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ISLAM AS A SOURCE OF OPPOSITION: A CRITIQUE, (U)
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ISLAM AS A SOURCE OF OPPOSITION: A CRITIQUE,
Sidney Jones, Cornell University

I think Dr. Frederick makes a fundamental error in assuming that agreement among the elite and urban middle class with the general thrust of government economic policies constitutes broad social consensus or that acceptance of certain political institutions constitutes acceptance of a regime. Even if there is a widely shared commitment to a policy of economic growth and development along Western, capitalist lines, even if the institutions of the MPR, DPR, and presidency itself are well established and accepted, there is little to indicate what Dr. Frederick calls a "commonly perceived social faith". Rather, the communal conflicts in Central Java and Jember, the extraordinary measures taken by the government to search homes, check ID's, and disarm citizens in Operasi Sapujagad, the increasing controls on press freedom, the constant references on the part of Daoed Joesoef, Sudomo and others to the existence of latent PKI threats and the need for vigilance--all of this suggests distrust and disharmony, not consensus.

The strict, practicing Muslims are certainly one of the most disaffected groups in Indonesian society, and relations have deteriorated steadily over the course of the New Order, occasional political blandishments like the recent ban on gambling notwithstanding. The deterioration has been particularly sharp in the last two or three years because of several factors--the approaching elections, the policies of Daoed Joesoef, the spread of fundamentalist ideas, and the publicity surrounding the corruption of the president and his family. At the same time, all of the more longterm grievances remain: secularization, Christianization, moral decline, lack of a political voice, central government encroachment on Muslim affairs.

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Unlike Dr. Frederick, I do not believe that the term "Muslim opposition" is a misnomer, and the degree of opposition of different groups is directly related, obviously, to the degree they have been excluded, feel themselves to be excluded, or have consciously excluded themselves from the political system.

A quick enumeration of these groups may be useful.

1) The paramilitary Muslim extremists

Such groups do exist, and the recent hijacking is a case in point. But like the latent threat from the PKI, the threat from rightwing Islam is more useful to the government for justifying enhanced security measures than it is a real danger. The organization usually blamed for extremist incidents, Kommando Jihad, is widely believed to be a creation of Ali Murtopo; most Muslims believe the label is used indiscriminately to discredit Islam and provide a pretext for the infiltration and surveillance of Muslim organizations.

2) ex-Masjumi elements

Masjumi as a political party was banned in 1960^{and} resurrected under the New Order as Parmusi, a pro-government wing of which was incorporated into PPP, the amalgamated Muslim political party created by Suharto in 1973. Most of its members are not represented at all by PPP and thus are without any voice in the present government. Furthermore, many of its members, organized under Mohammed Natsir's Dewan Da'wah Islam, are urban-based entrepreneurs and lower middle class workers who have suffered steady economic decline under the New Order.

3) Muslim youth groups

Groups like Ansor, Gerakan Pemuda Islam (officially banned), HMI and others share many of the student concerns, and tend to be more militant, more ideological, and more daring than their elders.

4) Rural kyais and their followers in Java.

While the Nahdatul Ulama are an important element of PPP, many of these NU-affiliated kyai regard the politicians in Jakarta as loyal opposition and are deeply suspicious of other government sponsored organizations that are supposed to function as intermediaries with Muslim groups—GOLKAR, of course, the Majelis Ulama Indonesia and its regional branches, and to some extent, the Ministry of Religion. Disaffection with the government is such that there is a movement afoot among some of the kyais to "golput" or cast a blank ballot in the upcoming elections in the belief that no vote at all is a stronger condemnation of the system than a vote for the opposition.

Nonetheless, PPP at the local level plays a much different role from the PPP in Jakarta. It loses its amalgam status, in a de facto sense at least, and becomes in East Java, for example, equivalent to NU. It is at this level that the most bitter battles between GOLKAR and PPP are likely to be fought, in both an electoral and a physical sense.

None of the above groups have any particular stake in the present system (I have deliberately left out the liberal Muslim intelligentsia, many of them ex-KAMI members, most of them highly educated and Jakarta-based. This is the group that most closely approximates Dr. Frederick's characterizations, and while they have no love for the present regime, they are more likely to oppose it for its lack of responsiveness and violation of political and civil liberties than they are for its anti-Islamic character.) Very few individuals in the groups listed above have accepted the principle of "secularism without secularization" that Dr. Frederick quotes. The fact that very few have developed coherent alternatives to the present government is more or less irrelevant to the strength of their discontent. These groups cannot bring down the regime by themselves, but their opposition has two implications. First, if it comes to

a showdown between Suharto (or his close associates in the event of his death or incapacitation) and almost any other rival, the Muslims are unlikely to support the Suharto side. Non-support may be as critical as active opposition. Secondly, tensions felt by members of these groups as a result of ^{perceived} political and economic deprivations are likely to lead to more frequent incidents of anomic violence than can be exploited by more powerful, that is to say military, factions.

One final note on Dr. Frederick's mention of the Islamicization of the government. While there may be elements of religious revival involved in, for example, the increasing number of government offices holding Friday prayers, and while the government has undoubtedly taken steps to try and mend fences with orthodox Islam in time for the elections, many Muslims regard the more conspicuous aspects of Islamicization as part of an effort to "tame" or "domesticate" Islam. The widely publicized pilgrimages of leading Cabinet ministers to Mecca, the restrictions on Christian missionary activity, and the gambling ban are three examples. But just as acceptance of secularism does not mean acceptance of the regime, gestures to Islam from the regime do not mean that any differences have been bridged. Muslim opposition remains an important factor, in the vulnerability of the regime in terms of non-support and the potential for undirected violence.

APRIL, 1981

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